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# INFLUENCE OF THE IDEA OF ÆSTHETIC PROPORTION ON THE ETHICS OF SHAFTESBURY.

(INSCRIBED TO PROFESSOR MAX DESOIR.)

By M. F. LIBBY.

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NOTE.—In the British Museum I found a very full bibliography under Cooper, "3rd Earl."

## INTRODUCTION.

The following is an essay toward estimating the influence which certain æsthetic notions, and especially those of proportion and symmetry, more or less directly, but often unconsciously, may exert upon ethical theory, and through that, upon conduct.

It is certain that a simple preference for symmetrical arrangement has influenced the political history of countries by affecting the circumstances of debate and the division into parties; and that matters so vital as the size of a family have been affected by a taste for even numbers, or a desire for equality of numbers on the score of sex. In the section on *Proportion and the Good* it will be shown how profoundly such preconceptions may influence a complete *Weltanschauung*; and the ethical importance for good or evil of a sensitive appreciation of artistic form will be suggested. It has long been known that Shaftesbury's views are those of an æsthetic mind strongly interested in moral and religious questions, but the extent to which those views were moulded by two or three closely allied notions, proportion, symmetry, harmony, has never been brought to evidence, and it is hoped that the effort to do so will both demonstrate the permanent worth and rich content of his works, and

at the same time bring into clearer light his relations to later philosophers, such as Schelling and Herbart, whose main thoughts he foreshadowed.

An attempt has been made for the first time to show that the lack of moral seriousness charged against Shaftesbury's Ethics (Butler and many others, and Wundt, s. 327) results not from any inherent defect in æsthetic ethics in general, but only from Shaftesbury's seeming lack of feeling for what I have ventured to call transitional or provisional forms. (See page 491 of this essay.) And this criticism goes so far as to raise the question whether the beautiful in conduct is not rather honor than goodness, and with that whether the good in conduct is not rather pathetic, tragic and sublime than beautiful in the strict sense. This essay was finished just before Dr. Rand's book appeared; that work fully confirms the estimate taken of Shaftesbury's austerity.

A study of Shaftesbury suggests the unexplored wealth of ideas lying hidden in æsthetics and in literature, which call upon modern ethics and psychology for investigation and classification.

#### § 1. PROPORTION AS UNDERSTOOD BY SHAFTESBURY.

The word proportion plays a considerable rôle in various branches of science, such as mathematics, chemistry, music, and æsthetics. Rhetoric has its "law of due proportion," which declares that a thought shall receive prominence according to its importance in the whole piece. In ethics the idea of proportion was clearly grasped already by Aristotle. In æsthetics great stress was laid upon it by the Greeks, but Plotinus discarded the ideas of proportion and symmetry as unessential; and the Greek views of æsthetics had no real vitality from the time of Plotinus to that of the renascence. From the earliest times books have been written on the proportions of the human body. These culminate in Zeising's work in which he argues at great length that *beautiful* proportion can be formulated in the law of the *Golden Section*:— $a : b :: b : a + b$ , when  $a$  is the smaller and  $b$  the larger of two parts into which an object is divided. Fechner,<sup>1</sup> Theodor Vischer,<sup>2</sup> and others raised objections to this theory, chiefly on the grounds, (a) that Zeising<sup>3</sup> chose this point of section quite arbitrarily (*e. g.*, in the human body, though the navel, a section supporting the law in a remarkable manner), and, (b) that where an object is divided horizontally the most generally pleasing section is a bisection.

<sup>1</sup> *Vorschule der Ästh.*

<sup>2</sup> *Das Schöne u. die Kunst.* Pub. by R. Vischer, '98.

<sup>3</sup> *Proportionen des Menschl. Körpers, Ästh. Forschungen.*

But both authors were impressed by Zeising's experiments, and found much to confirm the opinion that his theory contains an important truth. Zeising's book contains a history of the idea of proportion. He made extended applications of his principles to moral and religious questions.

In the mathematical usage the word proportion is clear and unequivocal. In every measurable object each part bears a quantitative relation to the whole, but this ratio is not, as such, a relation of proportion. The essence of the idea consists in the equality of two ratios,  $a : b :: b : b^2/a$ . Aristotle understood proportion clearly in this denotation, and declared that it was an idea not confined to numbers as such, but *applicable to all to which numbers can be applied*.

It is sometimes said that the word *proportions* is used where *portions* would be more exact, but this criticism itself is perhaps founded on a misapprehension. It is true that a case of proportion absolutely requires a relation of four terms. If one now should say that a certain mixture requires a certain proportion of a certain ingredient, one might at first suppose that *amount* would be the more exact term. But *it often happens that in a case of proportion the second ratio is understood*. Indeed a judgment of proportion may be reduced in expression to a single term. To use a homely illustration, "That's too much sugar," may mean, the amount of sugar does not bear the relation to the amount of tea in the given case, that the amount of sugar bears to the amount of tea in the most agreeable case. Proportion may be predicated of any measurable objects whose parts can be compared with corresponding parts of standard objects, whether the ground of selection of the standard be beauty, agreeableness, utility, mere fact (standard of height in men, *e. g.*), or any other.

The peculiar quality of *æsthetic* proportion is that the ground of comparison of ratios is *beauty, or some other modification of the æsthetic judgment*,<sup>1</sup> such as humor, sublimity, the typical.

Symmetry is a case of proportion, but involves another idea in addition, namely, that of mirror-like reflection about an axis. In the history of the evolution of the art-consciousness there is observable a mysterious change and advance in the notion of symmetry which may be summarized thus: (1) a love of simple lateral symmetry, as in vases and Greek temples—a kind of symmetry often occurring in nature; (2) the growth of a symmetry of *interest, e. g.*, in a picture, a temple balanced not by another temple, but by some equally interesting object, such as a grove with human figures; (3) a tendency of sym-

<sup>1</sup>See Groos's *Einleitung in die Ästhetik*, S. 205, for difference between *beautiful* and *æsthetic*.

metry in the old sense to disappear altogether in a mysterious harmony of the perceiver and the object perceived (mirror-like symmetry of natural object (non-ego) and object in the æsthetic "Schein"), so that pictures, and especially landscapes, of a high degree of spiritual interest, often *neglect altogether the symmetry of composition*. This last way of regarding objects tends to make the selection of the standpoint ("station-point") for sketching less important, and *treats all nature as equally "beseelt."*

But the difficulty about proportion begins when the notion is applied not to simple objects of sense, such as flower-arrangements, cells of bees, shapes and orbits of planets, composition of pictures, structure of temples, etc., but to objects of thought, such as a "beautiful geometrical proof," or of moral ideas, such as benevolence and self-seeking, or of human passions, such as jealousy, ambition, love of honor, etc. The question raised by a study of Shaftesbury is, above all others, this: do terms such as proportion and symmetry (which apply in the strictest mathematical sense to statues and pictures), apply properly (or only figuratively) to the subject-matter of ethical theory? Has the conception of *giving harmonious form to the moral world* any definite meaning? Shaftesbury holds that ethics is a branch of æsthetics, and that the notion of quantity is strictly and most practically applicable to character and to moral or social relations. His view is directly opposed to that of those who teach that "das Schöne ist sinnentälig," "die Poesie ist sinnlich;" the maxim, "Es muss absolut etwas da sein für unser Auge oder Ohr," before the æsthetic judgment is called into play, does not appeal to his conception of beauty; but when one reads the dictum of Volkelt<sup>1</sup> "ich werde das Menschlich-Bedeutungsvoll als den alleinigen Gegenstand der Kunst hinstellen," or Herbart's bold assertion that moral ideas are legitimate art-material, then one feels that Shaftesbury would have agreed heartily, and that these two principles are fundamental assumptions of his system. The question here is as to what the so-called "concrete medium"<sup>2</sup> of artistic expression really comprises.

The word *concrete*<sup>3</sup> which occurs in so many definitions of art-forms is generally taken to be a perfectly clear and definite term, but it is in reality both obscure and vague. The word may or may not denote an object of sensation, and such words as *act*, *extent*, *grateful*, *reverent*, are quite as concrete as *brick* or *paint*. No one reading the literature of æsthetics can fail to observe that words like *sensuous* and *sinnenfällig* are regarded

<sup>1</sup> Ästhetische Zeitfragen.

<sup>2</sup> Encyc. Brit. Art. *Poetry*.

<sup>3</sup> Jevon's Lessons in Logic, p. 20.

as synonyms for *concrete*. The most general meaning, in fact, is "physically existing." At first glance, too, this seems satisfactory, but we shall see the results. Marble, bronze, stone, brick, wood, iron, paint, violin-strings in vibration, are the "concrete media" of music, painting, architecture, sculpture; they all have physical existence and offer something to eye or ear. Then, too, take poetry and the drama which Kant and Hegel writing in the age of German poetic genius rank among the arts: poetry has for its medium *language*, which reaches us through the ear, and is also "concrete" or "physically existing." That this view is wide-spread needs no proof, for it is well known that many definitions of poetry declare that words are to the poet what paint is to the painter, etc. But this may have another meaning which we shall discuss presently. Is language, then, in this sense a concrete medium for the sensuous imagination? Does it bear the relation to that which the poet would convey to his reader which marble bears to that which the sculptor would convey to the student of statues? The organs of speech are as real as violin-strings, and the sounds as real as musical sounds; but even if we assume that spoken language is essential to poetry can it be argued that spoken language as such, *as sound*, is an imitation of what is in the artist's imagination in the same sense as a statue, a sonata, or a picture is? It is notorious that when we say a word or phrase *sounds* badly we are hardly ever thinking of its *sound* as such, and that if such expressions were in a tongue utterly unknown their "sound" would not offend.

Language, even as communicated from the printed or written word to the eye, must certainly be said to have physical existence, but every medium of communication of ideas whatever, every such medium conceivable, must have physical existence, hence to pick upon *physical existence* as the defining mark of artistic expression, as distinguished from philosophical or scientific expression, is a mark of confused thinking. Words as sounds are not only not (except in rare instances) known as *imitative symbols* of what they communicate, but they are widely different in different lands, which sharply distinguishes them from such media as painting and sculpture employ, and which are intelligible to all mankind.

The other meaning of "concrete," as applied to poetical language is,—suggestive of a concrete image. The physical existence of the words as objects of sight and hearing certainly does not make poetry art, urge the holders of this view, but the physical existence, or *the imaginary physical existence of the images roused* by the words is essential to poetry. Abstract poetry is no poetry, they argue, and by abstract poetry we mean that verse whose words do not arouse images of physically

existing objects. This position is not easily refuted, is indeed largely true, and requires careful consideration inasmuch as it seems opposed to the idea that moral ideas are legitimate art-material, and to the idea that art may deal with *all that is of human interest*. There is a third class of critics, chiefly close students of painting, and sculpture, and architecture,<sup>1</sup> who boldly deny that poetry is an art in any but a figurative sense; and this opinion is encouraged by the fact that "art" in the universities is apparently confined to the three arts above mentioned.

If we regard poetry historically we do not find that poets avoid moral ideas, or ideas which do not take the form of sensuous images in the mind. It is true that sensuous imagery is abundant in great poetry, but the greatest poets, such as Homer, Dante, and Goethe, have taken the deepest interest in moral ideas, and the English poets have been pre-eminent for their serious consideration of moral and ethical relations and ideas as the names of Chaucer, Spencer,<sup>2</sup> Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden, Pope, Gray, Cowper, Burns, Wordsworth, Shelley, Byron, Browning and Tennyson, may serve to suggest. In many of the finest modern poems, by Arnold, Whittier, Bryant, Lowell and others, the treatment of the moral interest is the chief means of pleasing; they are certainly not primarily didactic, but they please *in* teaching. Are we to say that these are not poetry, and that their authors are not artists, or are we to define poetry inductively and assume an evolution of the art-consciousness? Is it necessary for one to reject the work of all the great poets in order to cling to the maxim of art for art's sake, or may one here, as elsewhere, allow the conception of growth and development to rectify the definition based upon a mere "*apriori*" or ideal conception of art? If one take a broad view of the term *moral* one may argue that no art product whatever has succeeded in rejecting all moral assumptions, or more or less clearly conceived ethical principles. If we enquire how it stands with the "real arts" in this respect, *do we find that the dream-object is confined to the sensuously interesting?* The facts are precisely the opposite. Indeed it is difficult to think of an old master, from Giotto to Rembrandt, who has not frequently allowed the didactic or the allegorical tendency to carry him too far to be quite pleasing. But within the list of works that are prized as pure art how little the evidence goes to show that the dream-object is not at all concerned with moral ideas. Take the etchings of Rem-

<sup>1</sup> Many admirers of the pessimists consider Music, "*die künstle-  
rischste Kunst*," as Prof. Dessoir calls it.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the remarkable Introduction to the *Faery Queen*, a work of the richest sensuousness.

brandt, take the *Hundred Guilder Print*, the *Return of the Prodigal*, and many more. In statuary take the Greek mythological forms, how overflowing they are with the purest moral significance. Music often has similar influence.

It is true on the other hand that there are poems by Keats and Blake (only a few, however), and paintings by Corot and Whistler, and a good deal of music, which have very little concern for those ideas of man's relation to life and nature which we call moral. These are not the chords, but the overtones of the social harmony, they are the art not of man as he is, a striving and developing being, but of what he aims at being in some ideal republic,—a pure and spiritual *play-art*.<sup>1</sup>

From the historical argument it follows that moral ideas are elements of the dream-object. But now it may be objected that while moral ideas enter into works of art they are not artistic elements of those works. In the *Hundred Guilder Print* the lights and shadows are dreamy and charming, the composition is mysterious and suggestive, we easily meet the picture halfway, flow into it, and appropriate it, and delight in it with tender spiritual sympathy. It is true that the picture represents Christ healing the sick, and that his attitude, and expression, and the strange atmospheric effects that surround him, suggest the most moving historical, moral, and religious, and even philosophical ideas, but these, according to the view under discussion, are not artistic elements of the picture as a picture.<sup>2</sup> Surely this view is untenable. *In any work of art the highest criterion is the harmony and unity of the total impression.* All that is not a help is a hindrance. It may take years of study before a spectator realizes the unity of a picture, but if study only tends to rip it apart how can it be said to be a harmonious whole?<sup>3</sup> Now the more one dwells on the meaning of this picture the more its lights and shadows gain in spiritual power, the more beautiful become the delicate drawing and the magical shading, and, therefore, it appears that *the moral ideas are harmonized in the total effect*, and that they are elements and important elements in the art-effect. Only when the moral ideas in a picture are so obtrusive as to rob one of freedom to enjoy it as a disinterested bystander,<sup>4</sup> not committed, as a bystander, to any set of opinions, do they cease to be elements of its art. But what follows from this? One result is that the only consideration for the artist is, not to exclude moral or even religious ideas from his dream object, but

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<sup>1</sup> Compare Ariel's songs in *The Tempest*.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Stern's "Einfühlung und Association."

<sup>3</sup> One cannot err in studying art if one strives for the *artist's attitude*.

<sup>4</sup> The will and attention must be left free.



to keep them under control and to handle them with a free humor, however earnestly. A fair-minded Buddhist could enjoy the *Hundred Guilder Print* because its moral content does not clash with broad ethical truth; but it is a profound error to deny that it contains moral truth because it offends no one.<sup>1</sup>

If now it be admitted that moral ideas may be treated as material for art, provided they be kept in pleasing proportions, it becomes necessary to enquire what proportion means in this connection. Here again it may be said, and has, in fact, been said repeatedly, that proportion is a term applicable to objects having physical existence (or so conceived), but meaningless when applied to mere ideas. The arm of a statue may be too large, but how can benevolence be measured? Now it may be made clear at once that objects of thought which have no physical existence may yet be measured mathematically with the utmost exactness. Take for example the idea of *time*. The assertion that a second bears the relation to a minute that a minute bears to an hour is a perfect example (in the sense intended by Aristotle) of proportion, for time is something to which number can be applied, yet time is less tangible than those passions and affections which constitute the non-sensuous or moral element in art. If so "abstract" a conception as time can be measured and divided how can it be argued that mere abstractness contradicts or excludes the proportion idea? When Shaftesbury holds that in literature, in enthusiasms, in ethical motivation and in the contemplation of nature, the chief thing is to preserve a just proportion between the self and the non-self in our affections, it may be said that his idea is fanciful, that there can be no scientific test of symmetry in mere affections; in a word, that æsthetic norms do not apply to the non-sensuous realm of experience. But wherever the notion of number or quantity may be applied there the notion of proportion is strictly applicable. A mere thought or feeling can be measured by its effect; it has (1) duration in time, (2) intensity of pitch or degree, it involves (3) the conception of parts in unity in many cases, and all these elements can be determined more or less accurately, either psychologically or physiologically. But indirectly, too, moral ideas can be measured in the objective realm by the study of historical and social institutions, and by their reflection in art.

Hence, accordingly, so far as the pleasure experienced in symmetry and proportion is the pleasure of a disinterested bystander entertained by watching the play of social forces, just so far can ethics be regarded as a branch of æsthetics, in the sense of Shaftesbury and Herbart, and moral ideas as elements

<sup>1</sup>The error lies in the narrow meaning usually assigned to "moral."

in an artistic *Weltanschauung*. Indeed it is difficult to conceive of either unity or harmony in the story of creation except from some such point of view.

It is, then, a fundamental error to assume that art demands "concreteness," and then by a loose juggling with words to substitute "sensuous" and "offering something to the eye and ear" for "concrete." What art demands is not the "physically existing," except so far as all experience whatever has its origin in the sense stimulations, nor even the "concrete;" what it demands is the *individual*. *Its dream-object must be single and individual*, not generic. It may deal, and to be great it must deal, with the general case, but *not through class ideas as such*. *Its individual may be the type of a great class, but it must be really individual* to be artistic. Art demands a profound individualizing analysis, just like science, but it requires also an individualized synthesis, and *the most extensive type, which is at the same time the most intensive and true to individual reality*, is the greatest triumph of art. "Long ago, in speaking of Homer, I said that the noble and profound application of ideas to life is the most essential part of poetic greatness. I said that a great poet receives his distinctive character of superiority from his application, under the conditions immutably fixed by the laws of poetic beauty<sup>1</sup> and poetic truth, from his application, I say, to his subject, whatever it may be, of the ideas 'On man, on nature, and on human life,' which he has acquired for himself. The line is Wordsworth's own; and his superiority arises from the powerful use, in his best pieces, his powerful application to his subject, of ideas on man, on nature, and on human life." This passage is from Arnold,<sup>2</sup> and faithfully represents the teaching of his riper years on this most serious of literary questions. The application of moral ideas to life, he teaches, under the laws of poetic beauty and truth, is the essential distinction of great poetry. Great poets are not content to give form to matter, but they will shape a beautiful character and state, so that the race may at last rise to a level upon which the moral relations themselves may seem a means to an end.

But it must not be overlooked that Arnold defines "moral idea" in a most broad and tolerant spirit: "Whatever bears upon the question 'How to live,' comes under it.

'Nor love thy life, nor hate; but, what thou liv'st,  
Live well, how long or short, permit to heaven.'

In those lines Milton utters, as every one at once perceives, a

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<sup>1</sup>Critics of poetry often still confine "form" to metre, and show no feeling for emotional, moral, and intellectual "architectonics."

<sup>2</sup>Essays in Criticisms.

moral idea. Yes; but so, too, when Keats consoles the forward-bending lover on the Grecian urn, the lover arrested and presented in immortal relief by the sculptor's hand before he can kiss, with the line,

'For thou wilt ever love, and she be fair'—

He utters a moral idea. When Shakespeare says,

'We are such stuff  
As dreams are made on, and our little life  
Is rounded with a sleep,'

he utters a moral idea."

This relation of art to morality, so much disputed by Arnold's critics, critics who share the culture of Arnold and the deep and widespread English knowledge of and feeling for great poetry, goes to the core of the problem of an æsthetic ethics. If morality deals with the whole problem of 'how to live,' and poetry gives proportion and form to moral relations, then Shaftesbury's view is sound; but if "real art" has no concern with moral relations, and other "abstract" questions, then the view still prevalent<sup>1</sup> (that æsthetics has chiefly to do with painting, sculpture, and architecture, and that it is frivolous to treat the "profound dissatisfaction, wholly different from æsthetic dislike, which accompanies the consciousness of guilt," as a problem of moral æsthetics), must continue to predominate.

Shaftesbury declares, and with good reason, that literature is the vestibule of his philosophy. In literature he discerned an art which concerns itself not merely with the beautiful grouping of objects of sense, but with the task of giving form, harmony, and unity to the scattered elements of human character, life, conduct and social relations, the imaginative construction of a beautiful and ideal commonwealth in which the poet should submit to the applause of humanity a conception of the life that would give established beauty of individual and racial conduct and intercourse, and reconcile the problems of freedom, communism, power, purity, and dignity, with the facts of the human body and of nature. This question has been confused by a vast amount of obscure writing, and especially by a vague and misleading use of the words *concrete*, *sensuous*, *form*, *abstract*, *moral*, by a lack of grasp of the significance of the terms *typical* and *individual*,<sup>2</sup> and by the uncertainty as to the value

<sup>1</sup> This view is no doubt still generally held both in Germany and in the English speaking world.

<sup>2</sup> The typical is the sublation of individual and general, of analysis and synthesis, and it is for this reason that the character of Buddha or of Hamlet is of ethical and philosophical import.

of associated ideas in the contemplation of sensuous art objects.

The general tendency of Shaftesbury's writings is to extend the territory of the æsthetic *Anschaung* in the direction of making all nature the true art-object, of abolishing the notion of artificiality, and of including the phenomena of character and sociology in the conception of nature.

## § 2. PROPORTION AND ETHICAL MOTIVATION.

Shaftesbury never uses the word proportion without implying an equality between real and ideal ratios. When he declares affections to be well-proportioned, he means that certain affections bear the quantitative relation to certain others, for example, egoistic to altruistic, in real life, which they bear to each other in his ethical ideal. This usage naturally leads to the question, how does he establish this ethical ideal? The answer to this question can be gathered satisfactorily from his various works. He regards balance and symmetry as elements of good proportion which appeal *instinctively* to human approbation.<sup>1</sup> He regards this feeling for form as primary, and not derived from the experience or reflection of the individual. Not only are the emotions and propensities upon which morality is based, derived from the natural organization, but also the sense of form by which the affections are judged (both ethically and æsthetically at the same time) is given in the natural organization of man as we know him. But he did not stop with this idea. He regards this instinct for form as being not an artist, but an art critic; it does not say to the individual, Do this, or that, or, Do not do this, or that. The natural impulse forces the individual to do *something*; the natural feeling for proportion reports upon the goodness of the result by a simple *yes* or *no*; it does no work, it assigns no reason, it does not even say *good* or *bad* in any moral sense, but rather *pleasing*<sup>2</sup> or *not pleasing*, and these terms can only be interpreted to mean well or ill-proportioned.

It follows from this that this æsthetic-ethical judgment is brought to consciousness only in relation to an action founded in natural impulse, stimulated through sensation, and more or less modified by habit or reflection, and consequently it may be said to involve an application of the form-feeling to a manifestation of the stream of power flowing through the nervous system. To what extent a serious disturbance of this stream might produce "that profound dissatisfaction which accom-

<sup>1</sup> In modern phrase "a beautiful ideal network." James, II, 665.

<sup>2</sup> There is a restful physiological reaction as if some impeded current had found its smooth course.

panies the sense of guilt," *when the organs of the body become the records of unharmonious habits or when the soul becomes disordered by passion* must be a matter partly of the sensitiveness of the nervous system. When the conception of proportion is combined with that of activity there arises not exactly a conception of form, but rather a conception of *harmony*. It is this idea which leads Shaftesbury to compare the soul to a musical instrument. The *critic* does not say whether the strings have the right form and tension until they are played upon. It is clear from this, too, that pleasure in the ordinary sense is not Shaftesbury's criterion, but the being well-tuned. The reality and agony of a discord of the soul must be thought to be quite great enough to account for the profound dissatisfaction accompanying guilt, provided that the æsthetic judgment apply to the moral world. But in reality Shaftesbury's most formidable critics hold to the vulgar, shallow view of the term æsthetic.

Accordingly, to Shaftesbury virtue is no other than the love of order and beauty in society; and this love of order and beauty in the world leads, he supposes, to belief in an orderly and artistic rule or creative principle.<sup>1</sup> His proof of this position is briefly as follows: The world cannot be thought of by us as a number of segregate unities, but only as a complex of related beings, in which man bears a relation more or less intimate to every other being. Virtue consists in sustaining these relations becomingly, and above all, the relations to the beings most intimately concerning us. The natural desires and needs insure intercourse among men; the love of social order is a love of harmonious natural intercourse, or flow of human activities.

Shaftesbury shows great interest in the problem of the descent of man as discussed by Hobbes, but this gives him no suggestion of inherited modifications of the mental structure; he assumes that the principal affections are inherent in the native structure of the mind. He makes a clear distinction between the intuitively necessary truths of the moral and æsthetic relations, and the knowledge of the outside world, but he expressly abandons the word "innate" (as applicable to the "Formgefühl," as a net of *apriori* relations), in favor of the word "connatural," on the ground that the precise time at which this instinctive knowledge is given can have no practical interest. He never clearly recognizes that his view of the *form instinct* requires him to assume a metaphysical theory as the basis of his system; he speaks vaguely of this instinct as indicating divinity, and yet speaks contemptuously of metaphysics, by which we may be sure he merely meant the university scholasticism.

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<sup>1</sup> That Shaftesbury's ideas were of this stoic-pantheistic order is fully proved in Dr. Rand's recently published work.

Aside from this his attitude is that of a man of the world<sup>1</sup> who had attempted to form some kind of ethical *Lebensanschauung* for the endless confusion of ethical phenomena which he had encountered in reading, and in experience of life, by an application of the generalizations of *the Greeks ethics*. Two ideas became selected as the most helpful in reducing this confusion to order, (1) Aristotle's conception of *the mean*, and (2) the conception, original to Shaftesbury, of the balance of the selfish and social affections as the most comprehensive application of the law of the mean to motives of conduct. These two conceptions blended into one general view of virtue. It is true that he enumerates a third kind of affections, the unnatural, which are neither selfish nor unselfish, but merely degrading, but he makes little mention of these except in the classification, and a thorough analysis might show a certain confusion as to their exact relation to primitive altruism and egoism. He has, in general, a preference for the division of any topic into two branches corresponding to his taste for symmetry. He does not distinguish the affections which sacrifice the selfish interests of the present in favor of the interests of society, from those affections which find their own interest in the common interest, though the former alone are strict opposites of real selfishness. In fact *the social affections in Shaftesbury generally mean the alteregoistic affections*. Closely connected with this is Shaftesbury's strong inclination to consider ethics as a problem of our present life, and to treat the conception of future rewards and punishments as of merely pedagogical importance. He is intensely interested in virtue as a terrene phenomenon, and not in virtue as an abstract quality predicable of all reasonable beings.

His view, though so simply conceived, enabled him to arrange the facts of life as he saw it, with much success. To every individual there are two great facts, *self*, and *others*. The ideal attitude of character is the *symmetrical identification* of the self with the others. To incline to either side is to cause either congestion or weakness in the body politic. Even animals have social affections. Female mammals hardly distinguish their young from their own bodies. The young of the human race remain helpless for many years, hence the education of identification through sympathy makes great advances in the human race. This grows into patriotic feeling or identification with and will to die for the tribe, and even for the human race, and leads to the conception of an ideal brotherhood or republic.

<sup>1</sup> Students of Queen Anne's reign will find many reasons why Shaftesbury should appear less austere in his public than in his esoteric utterances, if he was to influence his age.

The love of nature, as of trees, clouds, hills, and streams, is with Shaftesbury a *higher* step in the same process, a finer and higher extension of the enthusiastic sympathy for the non-self, which he calls virtue, or the love of order and beauty in the world. All his writings agree in treating the sympathetic unification of the self and the non-self through comprehension and fellow-feeling as the essence of virtue, and this symmetry is treated as belonging to various steps, the lowest of which is that of the instinctive love of animals for their young, and the highest a poetical identification of the ego of the æsthetic consciousness with the beauty of nature. No one can read Shaftesbury's treatment of the different orders of "forms" with a free mind and not perceive that it contains the germ of Schelling's system of identity, though the germ is only a germ.

This is the sense in which Shaftesbury teaches that a love of order and proportion leads to a knowledge of the divine. The conception of a progressive refinement or culture of the affections is the backbone of his whole system; without this ground of difference between the various stadia of virtue his system would be what it has often been called, a pagan æstheticism. His pure *Anschauung* of Nature hovers on the border between the natural and the mystical, between the understanding and the spirit.<sup>1</sup> A character is virtuous, or has ethical form, when the knowledge and feeling of its own claims and of those of others stand in perfect balance; but both knowledge and feeling become ramified and extended from the narrow confines of a hut of primitive savages to the cosmic outlook of a modern thinker. The peculiar merit of Shaftesbury is his insistence upon balance on the various intermediate stadia. His strong grasp of this idea makes him regard goodness and beauty as identical, and this conception is greatly strengthened by the Platonic idea that perfect, or absolute goodness and beauty are identical. But while Shaftesbury has this clear view of the various stadia of goodness, and of the absolute ideal of goodness, he almost ignores the conception of *process* by which new stadia are to be reached. In spite of the great variety of his ideas, this principle of symmetry, and this lack of sympathy with what one may call broken or asymmetrical forms, go hand in hand throughout his works as the characteristic of his way of thinking. *He vindicates no special or one-sided activities, whether in art, philosophy, conduct, literature, or religion.*

It is characteristic of his view of life that he regards solitude as egoistic, and sociability as essentially altruistic. This view leads him to argue that the study of mathematics is an altruistic pursuit. He overlooks the fact that the most sinister figures

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Kirchmann's *Æsthetik*. I, 54.

in history have mingled much with their fellow-men, and that the most benevolent have sometimes lived as recluses. It is evident that mathematical acumen *per se* offers no clue to the attitude of the mathematician toward society.

Shaftesbury always kept before him the conception of an ideal commonwealth, and in that sense he may be said to teach that there are not three but four classes of affections influencing human actions. Both this tendency to look *forward*, for one element of motivation, and his bold denial of the reality of evil might be treated in this paragraph, but belong more properly to the next.

### § 3. PROPORTION AND THE GOOD.<sup>1</sup>

Shaftesbury says little in his public utterances of duty as such. This conception is presented by him as a striving for harmony of conduct and of culture.<sup>2</sup> He seems interested mainly in the definition of virtue and of the good. The good in its various stadia is the harmony resulting from well balanced affections, or relations of the ego and the non-ego. Every form of relative good, he says, yields to a better, and all that contains mortal or corruptible elements must finally yield to the immortal and incorruptible. At every step the corruptible elements diminish, while the incorruptible increase. The road to the highest good is the middle path of virtue as defined above. The highest good is the harmony of the highest stadium of refinement and culture.

Shaftesbury is one of those thinkers before Kant who felt deeply that the world is in some way a harmony of disagreeing principles; he felt vaguely that one can stand between these contending forces, and see and feel their opposition, or rise above them and see where they meet in unity, like the meridians at the pole; which melt into unity just where they seem most to clash. When is evil not evil? When it is in a drama, for then it is only a play of the fancy, or when it occurs in a dream, for then it is all in the imagination; when we objectify our total experience, loosen the æsthetic spectator within us, and withdraw into a deeper recess of consciousness, for then we see life, the life of ourselves as well as of others as a play, or as a passing show, or as a dream of the fancy in which not only our bodies but also our souls act their parts.<sup>3</sup> Such is the drift of Shaftesbury's argument. This gift of sending the æsthetic consciousness outside the whole realm of experience, including our *own* joys and sorrows, and of viewing the soul and its joys and sorrows as mortal and merely imaginary is marked in

<sup>1</sup>The Moralists.

<sup>2</sup>Letters to Ainsworth.

<sup>3</sup>Schleiermacher—the world as art-work, and God as artist.



Shaftesbury and explains his bold paradoxes. He hovers constantly between a practical and a purely æsthetic interest in the world around him. The street is now a real street, and now an animated picture; the crowd is now a number of citizens, and now a realistic theatrical group; and now again citizens; not from doubt of reality, not from metaphysical idealization, but purely from an intense enthusiastic æsthetic feeling for form and for floating fact upon a broad, powerful stream of imaginative energy. This is the æsthetic *Anschauung* and makes evil seem merely a harmonized element in a work of art, while its mood prevails over the claims of worldly interest or every-day reality.

Shaftesbury felt this strongly, and hence arises his mixture of audacity and unsatisfactory explanation in handling the problem of evil, in which he makes naïve transitions from the position of admitting, to that of denying the reality of evil, with no apparent consciousness of their inconsistency. To the spirit at play there is no evil, but to the spirit at work there is abundant evil calling for intelligence and sympathy.

Shaftesbury repeatedly asserts that what is beautiful and well-proportioned is good, and that what is absolutely beautiful is the absolutely good. He also declares, though less directly, that what is not harmonious and well-proportioned is evil. But in spite of such assertions he is far from exaggerating the identity of the good and the beautiful, as can be seen by the following limitations: (1) He defines beauty<sup>1</sup> with extraordinary austerity, (2) He teaches that there are various stadia or orders of goodness and beauty, (3) He identifies moral ugliness or lack of proportion almost always with (a) excessive egoism or (b) unnatural affections. Accordingly his doctrine of the identity of goodness and beauty means simply that perfection of form is an outward indication that energy and virtue have reached a certain stadium and received the reward of striving, in the harmonious activity of the forces and affections involved. While the affections are divided the egoistic are evil; but he does not vindicate heroic altruism, and regards it as asymmetrical. *It never occurs to him that heroic self-sacrifice in the individual may tend to symmetry in the state;* hence his defective sympathy for Christianity.

Besides this discussion of evil there are three other discussions which Shaftesbury treats as preliminary to his doctrine of the highest good: (1) the meaning of the word "natural," (2) the probability of miracles, (3) the existence of God. We have

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<sup>1</sup> The emphasis given throughout this essay to the inward stoicism of Shaftesbury is more than confirmed by Dr. Rand's contribution to our knowledge of his esoteric faith.

to do only with the influence of æsthetic ideas upon these questions.

The word *natural* means either governed by the instinct given primarily by nature, or governed by affections occurring in such proportions as to produce harmonious conduct on a higher plane; that is, by a refined<sup>1</sup> and conscious, but yet adequate, naïve and harmonious, substitute for instinct. So long as man's instinct was purely undivided and unconscious he was not really a moral being. So soon as he began to reflect upon his conduct, his instinct became divided into affections. These affections must be selfish or unselfish. Even wolves love their young and identify them with themselves to the point of dying for them. The higher stadia of life differ from the lower, not in the balance of these affections, but in refinement and self-consciousness. *Unnatural* means lacking in instinctive balance on any plane of moral conduct. On this idea rests Shaftesbury's whole structure of moral good. To Shaftesbury a return to nature does not mean a return to ignorance or savagery, but to the well-proportioned affections of instinct on new stadia of progressive refinement.

He relates the discussion of miracles to his æsthetic ideas in the following manner: All nature is a miracle; the true modern transubstantiation is the perception of a bit of nature as "*beseelt*;" at a rude blow the hamadryad may desert the tree. Shaftesbury shows a half serious enthusiasm for nymphs and hamadryads. But these Greek miracles do not disturb the order of nature. The true miracles are always present and require *not to be performed, but to be perceived*. There are minds so ill-regulated that the order of nature does not kindle the sense of divinity; these think that any violation of natural law through prodigies would offer proof of the reality of spiritual forces. But miracles, he says, though they would be proof of power would not prove goodness in the agent, and hence not God. They would unhinge nature, bring confusion into the world, break its uniformity, destroy that admirable simplicity of order from whence the one infinite and perfect principle is known. The world is, he says, not a self-governed, but a God-governed machine.

The æsthetic argument for a God he bases upon the principle that while religion cannot be founded upon a system of rewards and punishments, it can be founded upon the principle of love; and the love of God can be immediately perceived in the beauty of nature. He does not hold that every man can see the beauty of nature in this way. But great leaders per-

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<sup>1</sup> By "refined" I mean here "sharpened" rather than *elevated* or *exalted* in the Christian sense.

ceive it and teach the race. Man's very struggle for knowledge destroys his harmony of perception, but the time will come when through adequate culture men may return to nature. He admits that while knowledge is imperfect it is impossible to prove that the universe is a harmony, but he claims that the more we learn of natural law the more reason we have to believe that nature is all governed by one spirit.

It is clear that he can have but one conception of the highest good, and he states with explicitness that to know the truly beautiful with genuine enthusiasm, and thus to achieve continuous and intense harmony is the *summum bonum*. On lower stadia proportion and symmetry are signs of harmonious affections, but the absolute beauty must be free from lower interests. "*The absurdity lies in seeking the enjoyment elsewhere than in the subject loved.*" This fine conception lies at the core of the æsthetic ethics. The psychological basis of the perception of the truly beautiful is in an affection which he calls sometimes enthusiasm, and sometime love, and which seems to coincide with the social affections in a high state of activity. Shaftesbury's ethical structure comprises a series of stadia upon which this affection seizes upon larger and larger circles of the non-ego to identify them with the ego. This process develops with increased knowledge and intercourse. It involves not only offspring, clan, country, and the human race; but finally (animals?), plants, mountains, seas, sky. When the more remote and insignificant parts of nature are saturated with this identifying sympathy it begins to be seen that the beauty of nature is literally a divine beauty, and that the soul is face to face with, if not identified with, the creative principle.

There are, he says, "three orders of forms:" (1) material forms, (2) forming forms, and (3) forms that produce forming forms, by which he says he means the procreative power. These three stadia are an æsthetic reading of body, soul, and spirit. The third order can produce minds, just as the mind itself can design material forms. That which fashions minds themselves, contains in itself all the beauties fashioned by those minds. These forms are the fountain of all beauty.

But this creative principle in man is the same which gives beauty and government to nature. It is the principle of beauty within us, our intuitive knowledge of form, that teaches us to recognize the beautiful, without instruction from others. The energy with which Shaftesbury explains that the pure attraction of beauty, an attraction absolutely *independent of the actual existence of the object* admired, must be distinguished from lower attractions, is nowhere surpassed, and is the germ of all that is best in Kant's *Kritik der Urteilskraft* and in Schiller's æsthetic letters. The highest attainable good is the harmony of the

being, involved in the perception of spiritual beauty through sensuous representation. The idea is essentially one of freedom. It can hardly be said that Shaftesbury taught an Identitätssystem, yet it is mainly, perhaps, his aversion to metaphysical speculation that kept him from making the step thereto. The creative energy in man occurring on the most refined stadium of culture, freest from narrow interests, finds itself in complete harmony with the creative principle in nature, showing as the beautiful. The world is thus perceived as "*beseelt*." There is no desire to see it other than it is, to perform miracles, because there is no possibility in this state of any *desire* of any kind whatever; harmony is precisely the condition in which desires are at rest. The soul perceives the divine beauty of the world and assents to its goodness. What is not seen as perfectly good is not seen as *beseelt* and harmonious. This is to see the miracle of creation and in a sense to see it from the point of view of creator; but this state of mind can hardly be called moral, inasmuch as it occurs at a point where the consciousness withdraws from interested relations.<sup>1</sup> Shaftesbury considers the human form as a part of nature, and as its most beautiful object. It was from him that Schiller took his idea of the difficulty of seeing the human body aesthetically.<sup>2</sup> In the *Moralists*, where he expresses so passionately his feeling for the spiritual beauty of nature, he confines himself to the beauty of landscape, because he knew that it requires almost superhuman elevation of mind to treat the human form as a pure æsthetic phenomenon. This passage was the key-note of the chorus of nature-poetry that began a few years later with *The Seasons* and which has been a main element in literature ever since. Shaftesbury's influence on Pope's verse<sup>3</sup> has been elaborately exploited, but his influence on Thomson, Cowper, and Wordsworth is far more important to us. Shaftesbury's connection of the highest good with a pure and intense *Anschauung* of nature and with the third or creative order of forms in man is full of suggestiveness, and foreshadows another problem of æsthetics, that is, the relation of beauty to sublimity on the highest stadium of appreciation. It is true that Shaftesbury speaks of nature thus perceived as beautiful, but the discrimination of beauty and sublimity was but ill-understood by Burke many years after Shaftesbury's death (1761), and was not understood in the modern sense before Kant's definitions (1790). Shaftesbury expressly states that the sublime places of nature, great forests, mountains, caverns, are most favorable to the contemplation of God. In this,

<sup>1</sup> Neither *immoral*, nor *not yet moral*, but *prætermoral*.

<sup>2</sup> Letter 26.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Vater.

as in many other respects, he foreshadows modern æsthetic views.

It becomes clear upon reflection that nature, seen as the immediate expression of divinity, cannot be called beautiful without at the same time being called sublime. In spite of certain differences between the definitions of Kant, Hegel, and Vischer, on the one hand, and of Fechner, Hartmann and others on the other hand, there is a general agreement that a sublime object must in some sense be great or mighty (*gewaltig*), that it must arouse a sense of fear and weakness in the spectator, and that this feeling must be followed by a pleasing sense of the superiority of mind over matter. (It seems that the tragic in the moral world arouses fear and pity in the spectator, but also gives pleasure by being perceived in the æsthetic *Schein*. This analogy has sometimes led to a slight confusion between the terms *tragic* and *sublime*; Shaftesbury uses the word sublime rather of conduct than of sense-objects). Kant teaches that, in the sublime, perceptions are not compared with conceptions of the understanding, as in beauty, but with ideas of the reason. Its effect depends, therefore, upon a *disproportion* between sense-perceptions and ideas of reason. The German *Æsthetik* in general derives the sublime from the "Vernunftidee des Unendlichen." There seems to be a great deal of<sup>1</sup> *relative sublimity* which does not quite arouse those ideas of the soul which we call *unendlich*, or absolute, or divine; but certainly the sublime is most effective when it does so affect us. (Ex. Coleridge's *Hymn to Mont Blanc*.)

On the contrary, the beautiful, instead of exalting the spiritual part of man and humbling the sensuous, brings a feeling of harmony and proportion between the sensuous and the reflective powers of our nature.

Hence, accordingly, it would seem that Shaftesbury's beauty of nature is not mere beauty: (1) because he views the whole earth, mountains, oceans, sky, with a comprehension of their enormous magnitude and power, (2) and because his contemplation ends in a referring of all this to a spiritual being. But on the other hand all these sublime elements are seen by Shaftesbury as a vast and *beautiful* harmony, while *the sublime as such is always characterized by a certain isolation*,<sup>2</sup> and, short of its solution in catastrophe, a certain *insolubility*. Can an object be both sublime in the strict Kantian sense, and beautiful at the same time? The answer to this is that before an object can really be perceived as (absolutely) sublime and (absolutely) beautiful at once it must arouse in the spectator a har-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Karl Groos, *Einleitung in die Æsth.* S. 310.

<sup>2</sup> Just as the tragic is characterized by loneliness, as in Hamlet, Macbeth, Timon.

monious perception of spiritual powers which *wholly* satisfies the aspirations of the intellect at the same time, and this could only mean that the object is known by a mind which perceives the sense object as a spiritual creation (or in other words by an intuitive intellect in which will and power are one, and the understanding a mere channel of communication). Shaftesbury probably does not strictly mean that the harmony between his soul and the *sublime beauty* of nature amounts to a sense of creation, but merely that it offered a presentiment of such a sense. Or if he *really* believed that he perceived the soul of nature in the beauty of the landscape, it is yet possible that this belief was the error of an enthusiastic, sensitive, and aspiring mind. The efforts of poets to see the world from this imaginary point of view frequently lead to poetry in which a high degree of beauty and a high degree of sublimity are more or less successfully blended. (Ex. Faust I. Prolog. in Himmel, V, 1-28.)

It follows from this that the highest good, as taught by Shaftesbury, is an æsthetic delight in nature, including man; in this state beauty on its highest plane forms a union of sublime elements, and the attitude of the beholder is that of an artist rejoicing in his work with a full critical appreciation, but with no thought of *merely* understanding it or fearing it, but of taking an ecstatic pleasure in it. In the progress of the æsthetic consciousness toward such an ideal, it is clear that the sense of sublimity must extend enormously before all objects can be received into an æsthetic *Anschaung*. It is probable that as knowledge increases and sensibility keeps pace, not only mountains, oceans, storms, are regarded as sublime, and not only the earth as a vast ball in space, but even small and hitherto insignificant objects which science has discovered to be examples of great natural laws. The *feeling* that should be inspired by natural law comes very slowly, yet both knowledge and feeling are implied in any progress toward freedom.<sup>1</sup> *In the days of Kant the view of sublimity which prevailed in literary circles was crude if not vulgar from our point of view.* Many parts of Schiller and Byron which thrilled our ancestors leave us cold. The average literary student of to-day in England or America accepts Matthew Arnold's estimate of Byron and Wordsworth as substantially correct,<sup>2</sup> though the Germans still regard Byron much as the English did long ago. Some modern poets find sublimity in objects that were once thought mean and trivial, and the tragic is no longer confined to the great and powerful, and indeed, in some instances, has been seriously extended to the fortunes of animals, if not of plants.

<sup>1</sup> Knowledge and virtue are identical only when knowledge includes the feeling which belongs to it.

<sup>2</sup> *Trent* on the Byron revival—but he does not refute this view.

Sympathetic identification of the self with the non-self follows, slowly, upon the searching analysis of scientific investigation, and begins to construct a spiritual, but not a superstitious, *Weltanschauung* nearer to that which presented itself to the insight of Shaftesbury.

Shaftesbury's view of the identity of the supreme good and the supreme beauty resembles that of Plato in many respects.<sup>1</sup> But Shaftesbury's clear and original grasp of the necessity for balance between and sympathy between the self and the non-self brings him very close to the present age. He may be said to stand midway between Plato and Schelling.

#### § 4. PROPORTION AND ENTHUSIASM.

Shaftesbury deals with three chief points concerning enthusiasm in its relation to proportion: (1) What is the nature of the quality called enthusiasm? (2) What is enthusiasm in the derogatory sense? (3) What is it in its best sense?

He made a highly original effort to see a mysterious psychological phenomenon in a reasonable and philosophic light. He considers enthusiasm both from an ethical and from a metaphysical standpoint (*i. e.*, in its relation to reality), and makes an attempt to comprehend both views under the category of æsthetic form.

Shaftesbury takes the conception of enthusiasm very seriously. He uses the word partly in its Greek sense (*ἐνθουσιάζειν*), and partly in its relation to those terrible outbreaks of religious mania which were so widespread in the middle ages.<sup>2</sup> Hence the mysterious suggestiveness of the word in this essay. In no case does he employ it in its usual modern English sense.

In the *Moralists* enthusiasm is spoken of as a *sense* by means of which the "divine beauty" of nature may be apprehended; that energy through which nature may be perceived in the æsthetic *Schein* as understood by Shaftesbury, who as a student of Plato (v. Rep. Bk. X) had grasped that conception as firmly, though not as analytically, as Schiller and Hegel. In the *Inquiry* he has based the conscious moral activities in the animal affections. While these are below the state of reflection they are neither moral or immoral, but non-moral or sub-moral. In the moral realm they show normally (he speaks also of unnatural affections) as selfish and social.

Enthusiasm may be described as a state of the soul in which the animal energies, acting on various planes of consciousness, urge the individual to extraordinary activity of body or mind. When this extraordinarily energetic impulse reaches a very

<sup>1</sup> Republic, VII, 517.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Dancing Mania of Middle Ages.

high plane of consciousness it produces, perhaps, a knowledge or power which the understanding does not possess, such as the power of perceiving nature through æsthetic intuition as "*beseelt*."

Enthusiasm in general implies a preponderance of natural energy over culture with a consequent lack of repose or stability. If the mind is cultivated adequately in many directions it makes a reasonable use of the energy supplied it by nature in the performance of its ordinary functions. On the other hand, if the mind has few or fragmentary lines of thought, and yet is supplied with a great flow of activity, it is always in danger of being roused to fury by the rush of superfluous energy into some complex out of which it cannot find a way for itself. The tendency of this impulse to discharge itself in action makes persuasion of no avail, because the outlet offered by any suggestion of reason is too slight to give relief.

Hence enthusiasm may be said to be bad when it occurs in relation to a notion not standing in well-proportioned relation to other notions. Humor is a peculiarly effective means of drawing off the energies of a fanatic or a mob from their fixed ideas if employed in good time.

The Greeks had enthusiasm with well-proportioned culture. Their *Weltanschauung* was broad and complete; though their knowledge was not minutely ramified, yet it was comprehensive, and was crowned by a mythology in which the muses gave them a *provisional or fanciful outlet toward reason*,<sup>1</sup> which though poetical was sane and natural. Aristotle and Kant do not take their categories more seriously as a set of meridians toward truth than Shaftesbury takes the Muses as guides to the Elysium of the æsthetic *Anschauung*. The Christians, he says, pity the Greeks, but their religion as humorless, fanatical and "soul-saving," is inferior in symmetry, naturalness and breadth. God, he says, with naïve anthropomorphism, is to be conceived not as severe, pompous, imposing, but as sweet and good-humored. Ill-humor is the result of narrow culture, or of opposition, but God can have no ill-humors, for in him all the energies get their appropriate play, and he is not opposed.

Enthusiasm, accordingly, is good when it produces an energetic, well-balanced activity in ordinary minds, and it is best when it, through natural power and well-balanced habits of associational thinking rises above the mere intellect to the energy of poetic genius, of artistic inspiration, or spiritual intuition.

In this essay on Enthusiasm, Shaftesbury shows a lack of

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<sup>1</sup> This is a main use of great poetry.



appreciation for the sublime, the individual, the tragically persistent, the inadequate but struggling idea. He has a vivid conception of what is harmonious for mankind or for a single fortunate and cultured person. But he never grasps the greatness of a man or a nation with a mission, a peculiar and divine vocation; hence his bitter contempt for the Jews as one-sided gloomy fanatics, and his preference for the joyous Greeks. He quotes with fine literary effect the saying, "though I give my body to be burned and have not love, it profiteth me nothing," but fails to see that *in the community*, "form" can be achieved only by self-sacrifice. To love the public, to study universal good, and to promote the interest of the world by making our best views prevail, is, he says, "that temper which we call divine." But this temper of making the good prevail must, he insists, be "*unbiased*," because otherwise we cannot "judge the spirits whether they be of God." His dislike for vulgar enthusiasm is a distaste for bad form. His dislike for an intimate personal religion, a "soul-saving" religion, is a disgust for bad manners. Shaftesbury, like Plato, had a remarkably strong grasp upon the simple principles of form, such as symmetry, proportion, unity. But it would be easy to overestimate his artistic gifts, for he shows little sense of structure as a prose writer, and his notions of art are the notions of a *thinker*, with no convincing sense of individual reality. He has a strong artistic impulse, but little physical basis for it, and no technical training. With convincing sensuousness, and training in observing and handling the individual case, he might have been an artist; for the enormous respect for form and art, which he continually displays, is not more remarkable than his taste, energy, and sensibility, his insight into character, his sympathetic humanity, and his impassioned love of truth and justice; all characteristics of the greater artistic or poetic temperament.

One might say that he had a horror of that sublime enthusiasm which, with some narrowness, but great singleness of purpose, has no thought of beautiful form in any relative sense, or on any lower plane than its particular "kingdom of heaven," but pursues the infinite and absolute in severe and disciplined striving. Shaftesbury was all in favor of broad, joyous, well-proportioned solidarity. Yet in his own inward life the beautiful in all its fullness reached the sublime level, and like his Greek masters he believed that he perceived not the shadow but the reality.

In Shaftesbury's last writings<sup>1</sup> enthusiasm is related to melancholy and even in a sense to sublimity. But melancholy is

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<sup>1</sup> Miscellanies.

pathological, and the true sublime is not tragic melancholy, but a feeling of serene divinity ("There is a power in numbers, harmony, proportion, and beauty of every kind, which naturally captivates the heart, and raises the imagination to an opinion or conceit of something majestic and divine)."

This *right enthusiasm* shows as (1) the courage of the true soldier, and (2) the genius of the artist, (3) it is the means of perceiving the really beautiful, (4) it is the spiritual element in sexual love, and (5) the flame of *pure friendship*; (6) through it, *religious feeling* becomes "an astonishing delight or rapture."

The *false enthusiasm* takes the form of fear, melancholy, consternation, suspicion, despair, and, above all, superstition, belief in evil spirits, and experience of morbid and degrading religious ecstasy.

His most fruitful new application of the idea in his last work is the suggestion that history may be regarded æsthetically. In Greece life was well-balanced, and beauty was generally worshipped. But when Rome came to rule, the power of that terrible empire tended to raise "an expectation of a divine deliverer." This conception is endlessly suggestive of the analogies between psychology and history; it is in striking accord with the æsthetic theory of the relation of the sublime to the terrible, and with Schelling's view of history. Taken in connection with his conception of the highest good as a sublime-beautiful *Anschauung* it would suggest that in an ideal commonwealth the Christian sublimity of spiritual power would be combined with Hellenic proportion and harmony.

His general doctrine regarding enthusiasm is that it is the *power* of the human mind, and that it is capable of almost any kind of results, depending upon the *direction* and *proportion* it receives from the reason; a means for complete slavery or perfect freedom. This enthusiasm he regards as the activity common to body, soul, and spirit, and he makes a vehement appeal for the view that form is a conception strictly applicable to the inner experience. His view is, that no matter how much knowledge and energy society may have, it can never have freedom and harmony until all the parts of its achievement are related in a well-ordered form. Harmoniously related *form* is the æsthetic contribution to ethics.

### § 5. PROPORTION AND LITERATURE.

Shaftesbury conceived that the function of literature is to show in a pleasing form a true image of the world, and especially of the relations of character and conduct. To treat the world of moral relations as material for artistic form by giving it expression in particular persons and situations is to be a lit-

erary artist. But this can be done well only by one who has a comprehensive sympathy for his fellow-men. *To identify one's self through imaginative sympathy* with all kinds of persons, to see the world as one's self, and to judge it as one judges the corresponding phenomena in one's own character, is to have the literary point of view. But to be an artist of conduct and character one must be self-critical. Our true genius or guardian spirit is our æsthetic consciousness retreating into the distance in order to judge the composition of our own soul, and "according as this recess is deep and intimate" we can see ourselves truly and obtain that knowledge which fits us to judge others wisely. Shaftesbury's position is as follows: The body is the seat of pleasure and pain, the soul, of hope and fear, joy and sorrow, etc., etc. The consciousness may be more or less fully identified with either body or soul; but the consciousness may withdraw from its immediate locus in either body or soul without, however, failing to do justice to the comparative reality of either; in this recess the consciousness is the literary bystander; the æsthetic spirit. It sees the world of passion in its own soul, but does not particularly distinguish its own soul from the souls of other human beings because through sympathy it holds their joys and sorrows to be equally related to it.<sup>1</sup> This point of recess is the center of all human experience; the artistic spirit knows the joys and sorrows of the race not less but more deeply than the practical consciousness, but it perceives individual experience, whether in its own case or that of others, to be part of an harmonious masterpiece.

The question has often been raised, why do we take pleasure in tragedy, and why is the pleasure great in proportion as the pain is great. Kant's teaching of the sublime shows how the painful becomes pleasurable when referred to the infinite. Shaftesbury's view is very broad, and may be stated as follows: from the deepest recess of the æsthetic consciousness not only the terrible and tragic, but *all the phenomena of body and soul* appear to have only *imaginary reality*, and the deep pleasure of the æsthetic *Anschauung* is in the sense of power and harmony which arises from unifying and transcending experience, while not ignoring its comparative reality, but rather most fully recognizing it.<sup>2</sup> Only from this point of view can one know the world truly, all others are unfree and onesided. Poets, lovers and mystics, he says, aim at seeing the world imaginatively, but they often lack the deep and well-rounded self-knowledge demanded for the task. This is Shaftesbury's

<sup>1</sup>The contemplation of a play should not excite the *will*, except in boors.

<sup>2</sup>"He that will all the treasure know 'o the earth, must know the center too." Shakespeare.

idea of proportion applied to literature as it has been already applied to virtue, the highest good, religion, and philosophy. This inner architecture, he says, must be applied not only to the character, but to society. We are to seek the moral Venus as distinguished from the sensuous. We are to use our sense of æsthetic form to improve our moral proportions, and this improvement will, in turn, improve our sense of form. Shaftesbury has always before him the conception of an ideal commonwealth where all will be beautiful and good, and the image of this state, as conceived by the poet, should be an incentive to progress. "Such a poet is indeed a second maker, a just Prometheus under Jove." He holds that only poets of just character can produce beautiful ideals, "for knavery is mere dissonancy and disproportion." He even thinks that music must have done much to promote civilization by setting up an idea of harmonious relations.

Even in art he dreads the discordant effect of selfish interest. Any workman who loves his work as such, and is proud and independent regarding reward, is a true artist,<sup>1</sup> and this spirit of idealism and æsthetic joy in the daily work, he declares is "real virtue and love of truth! independent of opinion and above the world!" In the same vein he praises Shakespeare because he pleases "without a single bribe from luxury or vice." He is far from advocating that literature should teach morality, he does not want moral purpose but ideality—beautiful moral proportions. "It is a due sentiment of morals which alone can make us knowing in order and proportion, and give us the just tone and measure of human passion."

It is because he thinks literature a good basis for ethics that he thinks it a better discipline for a philosopher than metaphysics. Literature is worthless when it is "Gothic or barbarous," by which he means lacking in design or unity of design. "Nature," he says, "cannot be mocked," that is, all that is ill-ordered must quickly disappear.

Accordingly, in literature as in other matters, it is only the regularly beautiful that appeals to Shaftesbury; not the striving for deeper spiritual content regardless of regularity of form as in the pictures of Dürer, but the repose upon an achieved stadium of perfectly formed beauty and perfectly adequate expression as in the works of Raphael. Yet Shaftesbury desired the highest degree of spiritual content. But he did not like those great transition movements by which what he esteemed the highest ornaments of literature are reached. He is not impressed with the tremendous complexity of the problem of transition from stage to stage of æsthetic and ethical forms,

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<sup>1</sup> Bosanquet's *Æsthetic*, 452-3.

or of the relative values of those masters who have and who have not symmetry and proportion.

In his latest utterances he shows a deepened sense of the truth that proportion has new significance as the social relations widen. This is observable in his remarks on patriotism as an ethical form midway between egoistic-family and egoistic-race affections. From his new point of view he seems to rank the egoistic-fatherland affections first of all. This agrees with his general moderation of opinion.

These are problems intimately related to literature and ethics. His conception of manners and morals as the same thing on different planes has also something fresh and interesting as indicating his tendency to see patriotic and cosmic affections as an expansion of the narrower forms of alteregoism, as shown in love, family, and party relations. Had he been given to metaphysical speculation he might have come to regard metaphysics as an egoistic universal form analogous to patriotic and race interests but more expansive still. When he says "to philosophize is to carry good breeding a step higher," he utters a half-symbolic truth about good form, very characteristic of his standpoint.

Another later thought is his application of good form to pedagogy, and though he says little, the topic is suggestive of the enormous importance of natural form in the complex associated ideas of youth, and of the danger of abstract, fragmentary, and inadequate ideas. He represents the English notion that balance and manners are the object of education. The teaching of this system inculcates honor rather than goodness or learning. It may be safely asserted that all specializing in single branches would have seemed to him dangerous, as tending to congestion and lack of balance. He favored those studies, such as music, poetry, history, etc., which tend to develop the mind all round. He identifies proportion with health and beauty. He does not see that harmony on higher stadia may be favored by sacrifice of harmony, or "that we should things desire that do cost us the loss of our desire,"<sup>1</sup> and yet desire rightly; hence, as was said in another connection, his defective sympathy for heroic Christian ethics.

## § 6. COMMON SENSE AND PROPORTION.

*Sensus communis*, says Shaftesbury, is not good sense, so much as the good *feeling* resulting from a fair and just view of the rights of all men.

In religion the opposite of common sense is a gloomy asceticism which despises the world and allies itself with the super-

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<sup>1</sup>Two Noble Kinsmen, V.

natural. In philosophy nothing is more opposed to common sense than the doctrine that man is by nature entirely selfish. In the course of the argument he declares that "it is the height of wisdom to be rightly selfish." It is manifest that common sense is another name for Shaftesbury's social affections; a term, as has been shown, which he uses not in the sense of altruistic, but of alteregoistic affections.

His arguments in favor of common sense are: (1) Friendship is admitted on all hands to be an intensely human quality, no ridicule of which is tolerated by the race. Yet this quality is eminently alteregoistic; that is, a matter of give and take: it is the virtue of a joyous and natural people. (2) Poets and musicians show in their love of harmony, and in their desire to please and benefit others, that they are filled with *common sense*, and they are accordingly accepted by common consent as true human types. (3) Lovers are regarded by all as natural human types, yet no true love is merely selfish. (4) The beauty of women also lies in a mysterious sympathetic expression which indicates the opposite of the selfish and sensual qualities which Hobbes and others regard as natural to humanity. (5) Even in war it is a mistake to regard humanity as merely selfish and wolfish. The soldier is a wolf toward the enemy, but nowhere else are so many acts of splendid self-sacrifice and tender devotion to be found as in the relation of the soldier to his comrade and his home. The coldest men are the slowest to take sides. (6) To be truly cultured is not to be selfish, but to have a fine and broad sense of proportion. Shaftesbury uses the humorous argument that if Mr. Hobbes had not been desirous of helping the race he would never have taken the very serious risks that attended the publication of his heterodox books.

Shaftesbury's view is that a normal man will do no wrong *and take none*. His argument is not against a full measure of selfishness, but against injustice. The natural conclusion is that a man of sense claims his rights, and that he who does not is "too good." To be perfect is to be well-balanced. To renounce one's rights does not seem right to him. He makes no distinction between the individual and the state.

This grave fault in the system has been dealt with by Butler and many others from the ethical point of view. *But the defect is just as marked from the æsthetic side.*<sup>1</sup> Shaftesbury continually speaks of the contrasted affections without observing that both classes struggle from plane to plane. A man may be unselfish about food, clothes, and pomp, precisely because he is selfish about others matters, such as scholarship, or fame. A

<sup>1</sup>Æsthetic ethics has suffered from Shaftesbury's error regarding the need of symmetry in individuals; it must be admitted that he was wrong before a satisfactory form can result.

prophet or religious leader may despise not only material, but also intellectual rewards because of a selfish desire for spiritual knowledge and power, visions, prophecies, ecstasies, miracles. It is evident that balance upon any of these planes would give an adequate and powerful ethical form *so long as the form remained unbroken by the ideas of new desires*. But the number of such planes of conduct is infinite. A man leading an intellectual life reaches a seemingly satisfactory form or set of opinions about life, in which his ideas and energies are balanced and connected, and lead to appropriate actions. But a new idea<sup>1</sup> rouses scepticism, doubt, hesitation; thought and action get out of joint, and the form is no longer adequate for naïve and healthy activity. Without these sceptical suggestions, often the promptings of ambition, there would be no rupture of well-proportioned views, but there would also be no progress in refinement and expansion of ethical forms. Shaftesbury, who is keenly conscious that only the pure spiritual *Anschaung* is the finally true form (the "third form" of the *Moralists*), often fails to apply this necessary conception when praising *mere lateral symmetry* of affections. He sees clearly that there are three principal forms, material, mental, and "divine," but *he has no feeling of the broken paths that lead from the one to the other*; no grasp of the value of the *comparatively formless*, of the *process* as distinguished from the result, of the sprouting as distinguished from the fruit. Eccentric affections, pathos, tragedy, individuality, sublimity, are obscure to him. Yet his answer to Hobbes is essentially sound. His attitude is somewhat as follows: an animal must be selfish, but it must also be good to its own; man, as a moral being, who rejoices and suffers, thinks and feels, may be selfish, must be selfish, but the really human and natural type must sympathize *with as much as he makes his own*. If Hobbes replies, yes, but the motive is his own good in some sense at last, Shaftesbury rejoins that in the refined type the ideas of *meum* and *tuum* fade into a harmony through sympathy, and hence, selfishness, which is essentially a notion of opposition, division, and number, is completely overcome in a sense of family unity. There can be no selfish element in the contemplation of the universal beauty because that state of mind depends upon a sympathetic identification of the self with the whole world.

Common sense is accordingly the conception of a *disinterested humanity*, and this may be described as the form which the æsthetic *Anschaung* assumes in social relations. This is Shaftesbury's conception of *natural*, and gets strong support

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Faust I, "Erhalte dich und deinen Sinn  
In einem ganz beschränkten Kreise."

from the consideration of the *impartial* attitude of the artistic mind in general, as, for example, that of Shakespeare, whose interest in humanity is at once free and intense. Common sense is the knack of living harmoniously in relation to the general surroundings, both material and moral, and the great literary character possesses this quality in the highest degree, though literary genius lacking in breadth is often conspicuously eccentric.

### § 7. PROPORTION IN CONDUCT.

Two points are clear from a general study of Shaftesbury's letters:<sup>1</sup> (1) That his style is more simple and intimate, less rhetorical than in his essays; and (2) that he is more severe in his condemnation of sensuality than he thought wise to say in his published utterances.<sup>2</sup> As a result of this greater sincerity we learn a little more about his ethics. The two chief points regarding morals, so far as we are concerned with his ethics in this treatment, are (1) that he recommends to Ainsworth as a rule of conduct the views of his own system, and (2) that he gathers the Nichomachean doctrine of the mean into a simple synoptical form in which all cases of conduct are reduced to four or five.

(1) His advice to Ainsworth may be summed up in the phrase, "Seek for the *καλόν* in everything!" This advice is given more specifically in the following forms: (a) In philosophy avoid extreme subtlety, and imitate rather the popular style and method of Locke; (b) In religion, be moderate, and above all be tolerant; (c) In literary style be simple and unaffected; (d) In reading be broad and impartial; (e) In the conduct of life be neither a sensualist nor yet a too unpractical idealist; (f) In social relations be neither selfish nor lacking in ambition; (g) Cultivate the body as a means of freeing the mind; (h) Avoid public controversy, but seek all means of self-criticism.

All this is summed up in the sentence, "Dwell with honesty, and beauty, and order; study and love what is of this kind, and in time you will know and love the author:" and in another place, "Seek and find out the true *pulchrum*, the *honestum*, the *καλόν*: by which standard and measure we may know God." Carefully proportioned striving is the rule of culture; this is beautiful conduct; the perception of divine beauty lies at the end of this vista; this is the highest good.

(2) In all his works (and particularly in the 8th letter of this series) Shaftesbury insists upon the sense of proportion as

<sup>1</sup>The private letters.

<sup>2</sup>He desired to influence the 18th century society, not as a prophet, but as a man of the world.



instinctive or "connatural," and not derived from experience. He declares that the approval of beautiful form comes from an instinctive capacity, and is not learned. Like Plato and Aristotle he regards the form faculty as the essential mental principle. He admits that this may remain unconscious until an object is presented to the senses. He does not, like Kant, attempt to show the grades or steps that lead from the simplest forms in space and time to more complicated phenomena. He is interested not in metaphysics but in ethics, though his antagonism to Locke sometimes brings him near to epistemology.

Shaftesbury's idea of an ethical form may be resolved into five fundamental elements: (1) Egoism, (2) Altruism, (3) Sensuality, (4) Spirituality, (5) Proportion. The notion of proportion applied to a just balance between selfish and unselfish affections, runs all through his work. The notion of balance between the sensual and spiritual is found chiefly in these letters: (1) in the warnings against pleasure, sloth, intemperance and the sins of the flesh; and, (2) in the warning that there is a sort of spiritual ambition which unfits a man for life, and lacks reality.

The most remarkable feature of his work here is that *he never falls into the ethical fallacy of confusing altruism with spirituality, or egoism with sensuality*, but takes these four as *cardinal points of his form*. Altruism and egoism are two elemental and equal forces in nature, they are the forms which instinct takes in the relations of individuals, and when refined by experience they combine again in spiritual power. When they are unequal in the individual the individual lacks balance, common sense, naturalness, (a bitch that eats her young is "unnatural"). Perfection requires two kinds of balance which one may designate as *lateral*, that is, between the contending forces of the parallelogram of social forces, namely, egoism and altruism, and *vertical*, that is between the animal appetites and the spiritual desires. We may connect this vertical balance with Plato's conception of the lower and higher souls, and with the Catholic denunciation of such sins as gluttony and sloth and adultery. But vertical balance is not more essential than lateral balance, and this conception aims at the sins of greed and ambition, and is the peculiar moral ideal of socialists, philanthropists, and the poor. An ethical form requires, then, the unification through harmonious proportion of (1) the animal lusts, (2) the spiritual aspirations, (3) the selfish, and (4) the unselfish affections.

With this simple conception of ethical form Shaftesbury unites the idea of *progress* through labor and study. Hence his conception of form leads to a conception of forms on various planes, the highest wheel touching the supersensible world.

The letters to Ainsworth in no way recommend heroism or martyrdom as a wise rule of life, but rather sense and tact.

### § 8. PROPORTION AND ART.

Shaftesbury spent his last days in Naples. He busied himself chiefly with the study of art. He made designs for pictures which he paid an artist to execute. Some of these are engraved in his works. *The Judgment of Hercules* is an essay on one of these. It is coldly allegorical. The didactic predominates over the æsthetic interest, and the piece is neither true to nature nor naïvely mythological or symbolical. Though not more distinctly allegorical and moral than many famous pictures, it quite lacks the fire and sincerity and technique that redeem works like Dürer's *Melencolia*, and Hogarth's *Rake's Progress*.

Shaftesbury's limitations in this field do not tend to prove that a fine sense for moral truth is not part of the equipment of a great artist, but rather that *such knowledge must be carried, so to speak, in the blood*, and not crystallized into maxims.

The picture in question is a kind of miniature of his whole view of life. Hercules is allured toward a pleasant glade by Venus and attracted toward a temple on a hill, toward which a steep road runs, by Minerva. Sensuality and selfishness draw downward and backward, and are opposed by spiritual ambitions and self-sacrifice. Yet Hercules is not less interesting to humanity because his will is determined only after a struggle.

Art, as Shaftesbury saw it, was a mirror of these great human passions and impulses, and beautiful because of the just proportions in which each type of character and situation is reflected. Beauty to him lay in the equilibrium of these warring elements. His views had influence upon the next generation of painters—the generation of Hogarth, Gainsborough, and Reynolds.

### CONCLUSION.

This study, from an æsthetic point of view, leads in general to the submission of the following estimate of the chief points in Shaftesbury's ethics:

1. Proportion, symmetry and related æsthetic notions are applicable to moral phenomena.
2. These æsthetic notions depend upon the native structure of the mind, and constitute our moral sense.
3. Virtue consists in preserving a due proportion in the affections: it produces harmony and happiness.
4. The identification of selfish and social interests may occur on any of the planes of culture between animal and spiritual life.
5. The highest good is harmony on the highest plane of cul-

ture, consists in a pure enjoyment of the beauty of all nature, and demands stoical perfection.

6. The highest beauty is sublime and beautiful at once.

7. Evil may be seen to be imaginary by a retreat of the consciousness into the place of an æsthetic bystander.

8. Enthusiasm is genius or fanaticism according to its proportions.

9. "Natural" means symmetrical in relation to egoism and altruism, on whatever level of culture. Common-sense is nature on a middle level.

10. Literature demands self-knowledge through observation and sympathy.

11. The beauty of art depends on a harmonious equilibrium of contradictory (moral) elements.

The striking defect of Shaftesbury's exoteric ethics is not any exaggeration of the value of æsthetic form, but a lack of recognition of those evolutionary activities which oppose form and destroy harmony on one level to lead to form and harmony on a higher level: as, in art and literature, tragic earnestness attacking unsolved problems of conduct and fate; in religion, a certain fanaticism; in morality, self-sacrifice; in learning, specialism; in conduct, martyrdom; and, in general, eccentric and solitary activities. He understood *adequate* but not *provisional* forms.